

**Concept Note**  
**Side Event at the 2026 NPT Review Conference**

**Title:**  
**Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones in a Changing Security Environment:  
Strengthening Regional Mechanisms and Advancing the NPT**

**Commemorating the 20th Anniversary  
of the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone**

**Organizers**

- Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the United Nations
- United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs
- United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research
- Nuclear Threat Initiative

**Date and Venue**

28 April 2026, 13:15-14:30

United Nations Headquarters, New York, CR.8

**1. Background and Rationale**

Nuclear-weapon-free zones (NWFZs) represent one of the most established and legally grounded components of the global nuclear non-proliferation architecture. By codifying regional commitments to prohibit nuclear weapons, they contribute to strengthening security assurances, reinforcing international norms, and supporting the implementation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

At the same time, NWFZs are increasingly operating in a more complex and contested international environment. Heightened geopolitical tensions, a renewed emphasis on nuclear deterrence, rapid technological developments, and pressures on multilateral institutions are reshaping the context in which these arrangements function. These dynamics raise important questions about how NWFZs can remain fit for purpose, maintain credibility, and continue to deliver practical security benefits.

In parallel, recent intergovernmental discussions have underscored the growing importance of strengthening cooperation and coordination among existing NWFZs. In August 2024, Kazakhstan convened a high-level workshop in Astana, bringing together representatives of all existing nuclear-weapon-free zones, along with international organizations, relevant stakeholders, and the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (P5). The discussions highlighted the value of enhancing inter-zonal dialogue, institutionalizing regular consultations, and exploring practical

avenues for coordination, including joint initiatives, strengthened engagement with nuclear-weapon States on security assurances, and cooperation with international organizations such as the IAEA and CTBTO, as well as relevant United Nations entities.

Building on these discussions, recent cross-regional consultations and analytical work, including initiatives led by the Nuclear Threat Initiative and research undertaken within the United Nations system, have further highlighted both shared challenges and emerging opportunities for strengthening NWFZs. These include the need to articulate a clearer value proposition for NWFZs in today's environment, enhance their institutional effectiveness, and reinforce their contribution to global non-proliferation and risk reduction efforts. Ongoing work, including within relevant Groups of Governmental Experts and recent analytical studies, further contributes to advancing reflection on the future role of NWFZs.

These discussions have also underscored the importance of improving information-sharing mechanisms, including through existing UN platforms and emerging digital tools that support access to treaty texts, comparative analysis, and inter-zonal coordination. Strengthening such mechanisms can promote a more coherent and coordinated approach among NWFZs within the broader multilateral framework. The outcomes of this process provide a timely and practical basis for further reflection in the context of the NPT review cycle.

In this context, 2026 marks the 20th anniversary of the Treaty of Semipalatinsk, which established the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (CANWFZ). As the first such zone in the Northern Hemisphere, and in a region with a complex nuclear legacy, the CANWFZ provides a distinctive example of how regional initiatives can address historical challenges while contributing to global non-proliferation objectives.

Against this background, the side event will provide an opportunity to examine how NWFZs can continue to evolve as practical, forward-looking instruments supporting the NPT in a changing security environment.

## **2. Objectives**

The side event aims to:

- Reaffirm the continued relevance of NWFZs in strengthening regional and global security
- Highlight the experience and contribution of the CANWFZ at its 20-year milestone
- Present analytical insights and practical approaches to enhancing the effectiveness of NWFZs
- Explore linkages between regional arrangements and the NPT review process

- Foster dialogue among Member States, international organizations, and expert institutions

### **3. Key Issues for Discussion**

The discussion will focus on a set of forward-looking themes:

- The evolving role of NWFZs in a changing security environment
- Lessons learned from existing zones, including the CANWFZ
- Strengthening implementation, institutional capacity, and coordination across zones
- Engagement with nuclear-weapon States, including on security assurances
- The contribution of NWFZs to nuclear risk reduction, transparency, and confidence-building
- Enhancing cooperation between States, international organizations, and research institutions, including through improved information-sharing platforms and analytical tools

### **4. Format and Structure**

The event will be organized as a moderated panel discussion.

It is envisaged to include:

- Opening remarks at the senior level
- Short interventions by partner organizations
- A focused interactive discussion

The discussion will draw on ongoing analytical work, recent cross-regional consultations on NWFZs, and practical tools, including digital platforms that support inter-zonal coordination, knowledge-sharing, and comparative analysis.

### **5. Speakers and Participants**

The event is expected to bring together senior representatives of Member States, including Permanent Representatives and other diplomats to the United Nations, alongside representatives of international organizations and expert institutions.

#### **Speakers:**

- H.E. Mr. Yerzhan Ashikbayev, First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan
- Chris King, Chief, Weapons of Mass Destruction Branch, UN Office for Disarmament Affairs

- Ms. Maria Cecilia Barcelos Cavalcante Vieira, Head of the Disarmament and Sensitive Technologies Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil, and Chair of the Group of Governmental Experts to prepare a comprehensive study on nuclear-weapon-free zones
- Dr. Robin Geiss, Director, United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR)
- Mr. Mark Melamed, Deputy Vice President, Global Nuclear Policy Program, Nuclear Threat Initiative

**Moderator:**

- Mr. Olamide Samuel, Network and Engagement Specialist, Open Nuclear Network

**6. Expected Contribution**

The side event aims to contribute to a more grounded and forward-looking discussion within the NPT review process by:

- Reinforcing the strategic relevance of NWFZs
- Highlighting practical pathways for strengthening their implementation
- Promoting informed and constructive dialogue among stakeholders
- Encouraging greater coordination and information-sharing across existing zones

**7. Contact**

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